



Relative Search & Placements Practice Bulletin January 2007



Kinship Care has evolved as a best practice because:

- It is less emotionally difficult for the child [they know the people with whom they are placed].
- There is greater stability of placement with fewer disruptions, and
- In many cases, it promotes reunification, maintaining needed informal supports as a child transitions home.
- It promotes permanent placement with a relative when a child cannot safely return home.
- It provides for maintaining connections with family and a child's culture.

Expectation: When children cannot live safely with one of their parents, the first consideration for placement should be with kin capable of offering a safe, stable and appropriate home.

Diligent Search: A diligent search is a continuous process of identifying, finding, evaluating, and considering *maternal and paternal* relatives of a child, to maintain family connections or provide a placement option for a child who cannot safely live with one of their parents. A diligent search begins at intake with re-evaluation at all "life of the case" decision points.

Intake: At intake, relatives, kin, and informal supports should be identified and include contact information.

Assessment: The process of identifying both *maternal and paternal* family members continues with consideration of placement. Engage the parents in planning for the placement of the child, identifying both *maternal and paternal* relatives and other kin. Get a signed release to contact the kin about their possible involvement or interest in caring for the child.

If you would like further information regarding CFSR please contact Krysl Lange, CFSR State Coordinator:

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Compiled by Child and Family Services Division, Iowa Department of Human Services

Ongoing: At the time of case planning and review, caring relatives and kin should be included in planning the supports for the family, and safety or placement of the child. Continuing the search or re-evaluation of interested relatives should be documented at least every six months.

Activities that support a diligent search includes:

- Asking the parents, other family members, and the child to identify kin
- Involving kin in FTDM meetings that focus on maintaining family relationships and connections, and considers best placement options for the child.
- Completing a genogram as part of the family assessment for both biological parents
- With a signed consent of the parent, contacting other relatives to see if they have any known address or telephone/cell phone numbers, and follow up on leads.
- If applicable, request Court Assistance to order a relative search and cooperation of the parents.
- Use the People Locator Search Engines available on the Internet.
- Use the federal parent locator described in General Letter XIII-J-12 3/16/99 Federal Parent Locator Service.

Documentation: The case plan update or the case file narrative should have documentation that you have made diligent efforts to locate:

- Maternal and paternal* grandparents
- Adult siblings of the child
- Adult *maternal and paternal* aunts and uncles
- First cousins, then nephews and nieces
- Great aunts and uncles.

Assess the Safety: The following activities must be completed:

- Home visit before placement or within 24 hours in case of an emergency placement to assess the physical safety of the child and placement, and identify all persons living in the home.
- Checks with local law enforcement and the Sex Offender Registry on all adults living in the home prior to placement.
- Child abuse checks on all adults living in the home.
- Criminal history checks on all adults living in the home. For emergency placement, a signed statement that indicates adults in the home do not have a criminal history.



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Multiple Options: When a decision is made that placement must occur and you have identified multiple options consider the following:

- ❑ If the non-custodial parent is not available, who does the child or parent define as the closest relative?
- ❑ If neither a parent or close relative is available, who does the child or parent define as "almost like family"?
- ❑ If appropriate to the child's developmental stage ask the child if they know the relative, have they been to their home, and would the child feel safe with them?

Protective Capacity: Evaluate whether the kin:

- ❑ Has demonstrated the ability to protect the child in the past while under similar circumstances and family conditions.
- ❑ Have adequate resources, knowledge, skill, and ability to fulfill the care giving responsibilities, meet the developmental needs of the child and any exceptional needs of the child.
- ❑ Has a relationship with the child and the ability to protect, nurture and care for the child for an extended period of time.

Managing Relationships: One of the challenges of placements of children with extended family is the changing roles and responsibilities for family members and how that may be impacted by past or current family relationships. Negotiating those roles with clear expectations is important to support positive family relationships. Intervene early to resolve signs of potential family conflict and to maintain the stability of the placement and contribute to progress toward reunification or permanency. Utilize family team meetings, mediation, or treatment services to repair or improve family relationships.

Supports for Kin: Talk with the caregivers regarding legal and funding options including the child's eligibility for Medicaid. Ask the caregivers about their intent to be licensed as foster parents. Provide contact information for the licensing process. Ask caregivers what they need to be able to care for the child. Share information about community resources.

Case Plan: Relative and kin placements are considered foster care placements. Complete the same documents as other out of home placements including case plan and 6 month case plan reviews.

Efforts must be made to:

- ❑ Promote or maintain a strong emotionally supportive relationship between the child and the child's parents, unless it is not appropriate to do so based on the child's need for safety or permanency.
- ❑ Promote and support visits between children in foster care, their siblings, and their parents unless visits are contrary to the child's best interest.

Resources:

<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare/publication.shtml>

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/permanency/relatives.cfm>



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